
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

Submitted by: Conservation Community

Finding: *(i.e., Conclusions reached after investigation and/or evaluation of facts)*

The Angora Fire burned approximately 3,100 acres of land in June 2007. Completed projects have, and pending projects will continue, to focus on removing hazard trees and, where appropriate, implementing post-burn management of areas surrounding homes, roads, Forest Service Roads and Trails and other miscellaneous facilities. The USFS has not yet begun the process to determine how to manage the remaining portions of the burn area, which constitutes over 2,000 acres.

Background and Supporting Evidence: *(A short statement justifying the Finding and describing desired outcome(s); usually no more than half a page.)*

The USFS, CTC and other land management agencies have already removed hazard trees on many portions of the burn areas where falling trees could pose a hazard to human life and property. Further, the USFS is currently planning its hazard tree removal project for those areas associated with USFS System Roads and Trails. Meanwhile, the remaining acres burned in the fire (> 2,000 acres), which are located in the "open/undeveloped forest," have not undergone any type of management beyond emergency response. The USFS has stated that it will undergo a NEPA-based public process to assess how to best manage the remaining portion of the burn area on USFS land. A good portion of this area occurs on steep slopes (greater than 30% slope) where the fire was wind- and topographically-driven up Angora Ridge, eventually reaching Tahoe Mountain.

There has been some debate regarding how this area should be managed. While many have suggested the USFS immediately salvage log this area, science suggests that the area could benefit most from being "left alone" (Donato et. al. 2006; Thompson et. al. 2007; Shatford et. al. 2007). Salvage logging creates erosion, which will increase the sediment loading into Lake Tahoe and further threaten the lake's famed clarity. Salvage operations also tend to leave behind the smaller, more flammable material in favor of removing the larger, more merchantable trees, creating increased fire danger (see http://www.sierraforestlegacy.org/NR_InTheNews/SFLOTR_2007-06-12_Insight.php). Finally, salvage logging operations can destroy the seedlings in the soil that would otherwise naturally regenerate the forest over time. While it

can take longer for trees to regenerate when left alone versus salvaged and replanted, the results are much healthier and pose less fire threat in the future.

During a workshop on 11/3/07, the public was shown a picture of a parcel of land that supposedly resembled what the burn area *could* look like in ten year's time if salvage logging and replanting occurred. The associated message was "support salvage logging and replanting and the burn area can be made to look similar to its pre-burn conditions within just a decade or two." The information disseminated to the public in this instance was misleading as recovery on such a scale is not feasible.

The pressure to salvage logs has often been rationalized by referencing a need to extract economic value from felled trees before their value is diminished. Forest management in the Basin is not driven by commercial value, nor should it ever be. Over one billion dollars has been spent in the Basin to help restore Tahoe's fragile environment and commercial logging is not a necessary funding source. Science suggests the burn area will heal better, and pose less fire threat in the future, if left untreated and unmanaged. Creating further damage to Tahoe's fragile ecosystem by commercially logging burn areas is contrary to the intent of EIP funds. The management of the remaining portions of the burn area must be given careful consideration, be based on sound science, and decisions made through the public review process that the USFS is already planning.

Recommendation(s) *(Based upon an analysis of the Finding, the following recommendation(s) should be made to the Governors):*

1. **The Governors of each state maintain that the USFS continue with its current plans to perform a NEPA-based public process to determine the most ecologically sound management activities for the remainder of the Angora Fire burn area.**
2. **The Governors do not let political or public pressure to salvage log the burn area affect the USFS plans to carefully consider future management activities for this area.**
3. **The Governors maintain that all forest management activities in the Basin be based on ecologically and scientifically sound determinations for the appropriate levels of thinning necessary to maintain forest fires at ground level.**

Impacts of Implementation: *(The implementation of any Recommendation is likely to have specific impacts. Consider potential consequences related to each of the following areas):*

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is REQUIRED (Best Estimate):

- ☐ **Cost** – Because these recommendations support existing processes already in place, there should be no cost impacts.

- ☐ Funding source
- ☐ Staffing
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is OPTIONAL:

- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Health and Safety
- ☐ Environmental
- ☐ Interagency